Alexis Franklin

HIST 390

Week 2 – **Primary Sources and Disciplined Inquiry**

**Activity 1 — The New Deal: Revolution or Reform?**

http://docsteach.org/activities/5826/detail?mode=browse&menu=closed&era%5B%5D=the-great-depression-and-world-war-ii

*Teaching and learning must have a purpose:*

Students will become more skilled evaluators as they practice applying evidence to a historical thesis. Because this activity revolves around students choosing and deciphering for in-depth understanding, they will feel empowered and motivated to make meaningful connections about the content. The concept of “reform” versus “revolution” has very broad implications, which the students will be prepared to address after considering these terms in the context of the New Deal. By evaluating primary source documents, students learn how to derive meaning from history.

*Learning means in-depth understanding:*

This activity incorporates the highest tier of Bloom’s taxonomy: evaluation. Therefore it is obvious that any understanding gleaned from this activity is very in-depth and high quality thinking. To complete the activity, students are required to do so much more than know the facts. It’s not about what the New Deal *was*, rather about what the New Deal *means* within its historical context. Students gain in-depth understanding by engaging with the material in a thoughtful, interactive way.

*Instruction must build on students’ prior knowledge:*

To make this activity worthwhile, it should take place after students have already become familiar with the New Deal and the political environment in which it came to exist. The activity itself calls upon more extensive prior knowledge as students start to make personal/interdisciplinary connections about what makes change a “revolution” instead of a “reform.”

*People learn through disciplined inquiry:*

Disciplined inquiry is the foundation of this entire activity, because it hinges on students’ ability to find their own information from the sources and draw their own conclusions about meaning. The teacher models document analysis and poses some thought-provoking questions, and then the students are free to go about their own process of inquiry. Meaning doesn’t come from the teacher, but from the students themselves—this is exactly how learning happens.

*Constructive assessment:*

The activity can be assessed by its completion on the computer: have the students successfully evaluated each primary source by placing it on the scale of “reform” versus “revolution”? Participation indicates that students practiced evaluating evidence. The teacher can further check students’ understanding during the subsequent class discussion.

**Activity 2 — What Else Was Happening During the Civil War Era?**

http://docsteach.org/activities/22/detail?mode=browse&menu=closed&era%5B%5D=civil-war-and-reconstruction

*Teaching and learning must have a purpose:*

The purpose of this activity is to give students a broader perspective on the Civil War era. Rather than re-hashing North-South tensions and President Lincoln, this activity provides an opportunity to consider everything else that was going on simultaneously. This sets students up to have a more multifaceted, practical historical understanding. Moreover, because students are actively sequencing the various primary source documents, they will be encouraged to make connections about causation and influence—another important component of historical thinking.

*Learning means in-depth understanding:*

This is an “analysis” activity, wherein students make inferences based on evidence. Students will be breaking down the information they’re confronted with by the sources to make connections and draw conclusions for themselves. By sequencing the sources, students can analyze the relationships between them. This all goes far beyond surface-level understanding of what would otherwise seem like unrelated, random tidbits.

*Instruction must build on students’ prior knowledge:*

This activity is designed so that it can take place before, during, or after a Civil War unit. The reason this is so open-ended is that it relies heavily on students’ prior knowledge. The sources themselves deviate from the typical exclusionary emphasis on the war itself and on the issue of slavery. To learn about “what else was happening during the Civil War era,” students will be drawing on their analytical skills and their prior knowledge to draw conclusions about this period.

*People learn through disciplined inquiry:*

The teacher does not present students with a timeline of events that they should study. The expectation is not learning via “transmission.” In this activity, students are actively compiling the information for themselves. The teacher provides the primary source documents, and students are responsible for breaking them down to see what they know. When students analyze the documents for themselves, they create meaning, make connections, and learn through disciplined inquiry.

*Constructive assessment:*

Students can be assessed on completion of their hypotheses regarding the sequence of the primary source documents. They can also then be assessed on their engagement with specific sources, on whether or not they were able to successfully analyze the document to glean significant information about its historical context.